

# Stupendous Spellers

Children of Indian heritage won the top three spots this year in America's largest educational promotion, the annual National Spelling Bee, sponsored by the E.W. Scripps Co. newspaper chain. Kids with Indian parents or grandparents have been doing well in the competition since Balu Natarajan won by spelling "milieu" in 1985. But this June's win for Anurag Kashyap and second-place tie for Samir Sudhir Patel and Aliya Robin Deri has news media and teachers wondering what makes Indian American children spell esoteric words so well when most people in their community do not speak English as their mother tongue.

For Anurag, 13, of Poway, California, the secrets to success seem obvious: hard work, confidence and experience. "I had contested in the spelling bee last year as well and was confident that my hard work would pay off," he said, after clinching the title with the word "appoggiatura," a type of musical tone. Anurag—an avid reader who is also good at math, science and geography—rushed into his father's arms and burst into tears after he beat 272 other competitors to win \$30,000 in cash, scholarships and books. He said he was feeling "just sheer happiness."

Samir, 11, of Colleyville, Texas, and Aliya, 13, of Pleasanton, California, each won \$4,000.

The use of the word "bee" to describe American community efforts such as spelling bees, sewing bees and quilting bees is a language puzzle. Recently scholars have speculated it comes from the same Middle English word as "boon," meaning "voluntary help given by neighbors toward the accomplishment of a task," according to Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

In that case it is appropriate. Community newspapers sponsor local contests and pay to send the winners to the state and national championships.

—L.K.L.

Anurag Kashyap celebrates after winning the 78th annual National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C., on June 2.



National Spelling Bee runners-up Samir Sudhir Patel (right) and Aliya Robin Deri (far right).



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